

50 Years Ago in The Journal of Pediatrics: The Role of Marihuana in Patterns of Drug Abuse by Adolescents

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Milman D. J Pediatr 1969;74:283-90

In the 1960s, the spreading use of marijuana and other drugs into high schools, colleges, and the armed forces serving in Vietnam lead to a clamor for legislative changes regarding marijuana distribution and use; this remains a topic of debate to this day.

In this case series, the author evaluates the use of marijuana among adolescents in relation to the development of schizophrenia and other chronic deleterious effects. The author contends that marijuana use was the precipitating event that lead to an episode of acute psychosis in 11 youths, an argument that had previously been proposed by Keeler regarding adverse reactions in college students using marijuana.¹

The author contends that marijuana should be considered a threat to adolescents, particularly those with preexisting personality disorders who may be predisposed to develop schizophrenia.

Half a century later, the mechanism of cannabis use as a trigger for the development of an acute psychotic episode and subsequent schizophrenia remains both unclear and contested. What has been established is that the high comorbidity rate of substance abuse in patients with schizophrenia, in particular marijuana, has been linked to worse clinical outcomes, such as increased loss of gray matter in the brain.²

Marijuana use among individuals with psychosis is nearly 3-fold higher than in the general population and has been associated with earlier age of onset of psychosis.³

With recent increases in cannabis use among 8th-12th graders to 24% in 2017 and the changing topography of marijuana legalization, Milman's original concerns about marijuana use among adolescents at risk for psychotic disorders remains valid 50 years later.⁴

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